

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 07412 272121Z

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ACTION EA-10

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R 251202Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3366

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 7412

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, ASEAN, SN, TH

SUBJECT: LEE KUAN YEW VISITS THAILAND

REF: BANGKOK 7368

SUMMARY. SINGAPORE PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW VISITED THAILAND APRIL 22-23 ENROUTE TO THE COMMONWEALTH PRIME MINISTER'S CONFERENCE IN JAMAICA. PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT PRAMOT, FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN, AND VARIOUS THAI DEFENSE OFFICIALS, MET WITH LEE. DURING HIS APRIL 23 PRESS CONFERENCE (REFTEL), LEE ANNOUNCED THAT HE HAD DISCUSSED THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN CAMBODIA, SOUTH VIETNAM, AND LAOS DURING MEETINGS WITH THAI LEADERS. HE ALSO STATED THAT THE TIME HAS COME TO ESTABLISH CORDIAL RELATIONS WITH ALL COUNTRIES OF INDOCHINA, WHETHER COMMUNIST OR COALITION. LEE TOLD THE CHARGE THAT U.S. EFFORTS IN INDOCHINA HAD THE PRINCIPAL EFFECT OF STIFFENING THE SPINE OF THE INDONESIAN GENERALS IN 1965. IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS WITH RTG OFFICIALS, LEE GAVE THE ADVICE THAT THAILAND
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BANGKO 07412 272121Z

NOT PRECIPITATE WITH WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES AND THAT

SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES REVISE THEIR MILITARY THINKING
BY EMPHASIZING COUNTERINSURGENCY RATHER THAN CONVENTIONAL
WARFARE. END SUMMARY.

1. PRIME MINISTER LEE ARRIVED IN BANGKOK APRIL 22
FOR THE PURPOSE OF OBTAINING A FIRST-HAND ASSESSMENT
OF THE CURRENT POLITICAL AND MILITARY SITUATION IN
THAILAND. DURING HIS TWO DAY VISIT, PRIME MINISTER
KHUKRIT, FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI, ACTING SUPREME
COMMANDER AND ARMY COMMANDER IN CHIEF GENERAL KRIT
SIWARA, AND ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL KRIANGSAK
CHAMANAN RECEIVED LEE. KHUKRIT HOSTED A DINNER
APRIL 22 IN LEE'S HONOR. INCLUDED AS GUESTS WERE THE RTG
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, FOREIGN MINISTER, AGRICULTURAL
MINISTER, MINISTER ATTACHED TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE,
AND A FEW OTHER SENIOR OFFICIALS. THE CHIEFS OF MISSION
OF THE ASEAN NATIONS PLUS NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA, UNITED
KINGDOM, AND THE UNITED STATES ALSO ATTENDED.

2. EMBASSY SOURCES REPORT THAT IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO
HIS VISIT, LEE INFORMED CHATCHAI THAT HE SEES THAILAND
AS POTENTIALLY "THE NEXT DOMINO" IN SOUTHEAST ASIA,
AND THAT HE CONSIDERS IT EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TO
UNDERSTAND FULLY THAILAND'S WILL TO RESIST COMMUNIST
INCURSIONS. LEE REPORTEDLY HOPES TO FURTHER EFFORTS
OF ASEAN MEMBERS TO ACT COLLECTIVELY IN CONTAINING
COMMUNIST EXPANSION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.

3. LEE HELD A PRESS CONFERENCE APRIL 23 (REFTEL WHICH THE LOCAL
PRESS WIDELY COVERED. HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDED IN HIS
OPENING STATEMENT WERE HIS ASSESSMENT THAT THE "LASTING
SOLUTION REMAINS THE SAME, NAMELY TO CREATE STABLE,
CONSTRUCTIVE RELATIONS WITH ASEAN AND THROUGH
CONSULTATIONS AND COORDINATION OF POLICIES TO INCREASE
THE SOLIDARITY OF THE GROUP, ASSURING CONTINUING
STABILITY IN THE AREA AND UNINTERRUPTED ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT. EACH ASEAN COUNTRY HAS TO ENSURE
SUFFICIENT ECONOMIC PROGRESS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE THAT
WILL MAKE INSURGENCY UNATTRACTIVE AND UNLIKELY TO
SUCCEED." LEE CONCLUDED HIS STATEMENT BY NOTING
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BANGKO 07412 272121Z

THAT "NOW WE SHALL ALL HAVE TO ESTABLISH CORRECT AND,
IF POSSIBLE, CORDIAL RELATIONS WITH THE COUNTRIES OF
INDOCHINA, WHETHER THEIR GOVERNMENTS ARE COMMUNIST,
OR COALITION TYPES, LIKE LAOS."

4. LEE TOLD THE CHARGE DURING THE APRIL 22 DINNER
THAT THE DEFEAT OF THE COMMUNISTS IN INDONESIA
MAY BE ONE OF THE FEW BENEFITS OF OUR INVOLVEMENT IN

THE INDOCHINA AREA. HE SAID HE WAS CONVINCED THAT THE
INDONESIAN GENERALS WOULD NOT HAVE STOOD UP TO THE
COMMUNISTS IN 1965 IF WE HAD NOT BEEN PROTECTING THEIR
FLANK IN SOUTH VIETNAM. LEE INDICATED AGREEMENT WITH
THE VIEW THAT THE U.S. ROLE IN INDOCHINA HAD ALSO
BOUGHT TIME FOR COUNTRIES SUCH AS THAILAND TO IMPROVE
THEIR ECONOMIES AND INTERNAL DEFENSE.

5. IN FURTHER CONVERSATION WITH THE CHARGE, LEE
STATED THAT THE U.S. SHOULD NOT HAVE BECOME INVOLVED
DIRECTLY IN THE WAR UNLESS WE WERE PREPARED TO DO
WHATEVER WAS REQUIRED TO WIN.

6. RTG CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION SECRETARY GENERAL
CHINDA NA SONGKHLA, A CAMBRIDGE CLASSMATE OF LEE'S,
TOLD THE CHARGE THAT LEE HAD ADVISED COUNTRIES IN THIS
AREA TO REVISE THEIR MILITARY THINKING BY MOVING AWAY
FROM AN EMPHASIS ON CONVENTIONAL WARFARE TO A COUNTER-
INSURGENCY STRATEGY.

7. FOLLOWING PRIME MINISTER LEE'S DEPARTURE, A MID-LEVEL
MFA OFFICIAL COMMENTED TO AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT THE
VISIT WAS USEFUL TO THAI OFFICIALS WHO BENEFITED FROM
LISTENING TO LEE'S VIEWS ON THE SITUATION IN SOUTHEAST
ASIA. LEE REPORTEDLY EXPRESSED TO RTG OFFICIALS HIS
DESIRE THAT THAILAND NOT PRECIPITATE THE WITHDRAWAL
OF U.S. FORCES. IN RESPONSE, PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT
REPORTEDLY EXPLAINED HIS GOVERNMENT'S POLICY ON U.S.
TROOP WITHDRAWALS WITHIN ONE YEAR'S TIME. GENERAL KRIT
TOLD THE CHARGE' APRIL 25 THAT LEE HAD URGED KHUKRIT TO "GO SLOW"
IN PRESSING FOR U.S. WITHDRAWALS BUT KHUKRIT SAT SILENTLY
AND MADE NO RESPONSE. KRIT SAID THAT IN HIS PRIVATE MEETING WITH
LEE HE HIT HARD ON THE NEED FOR A CONTINUED U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 BANGKO 07412 272121Z

AND LEE FULLY AGREED.
MASTERS

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